

(19)



Europäisches Patentamt
European Patent Office
Office européen des brevets



(11)

EP 1 129 673 A2

(12)

EUROPEAN PATENT APPLICATION

(43) Date of publication:
05.09.2001 Bulletin 2001/36

(51) Int Cl.7: A61F 2/06

(21) Application number: 01104468.2

(22) Date of filing: 28.02.2001

(84) Designated Contracting States:
AT BE CH CY DE DK ES FI FR GB GR IE IT LI LU

MC NL PT SE TR

Designated Extension States:

AL LT LV MK RO SI

(30) Priority: 01.03.2000 US 516753
08.05.2000 US 202723 P

(71) Applicant: Medinol Ltd.
Tel Aviv 61581 (IL)

(72) Inventors:

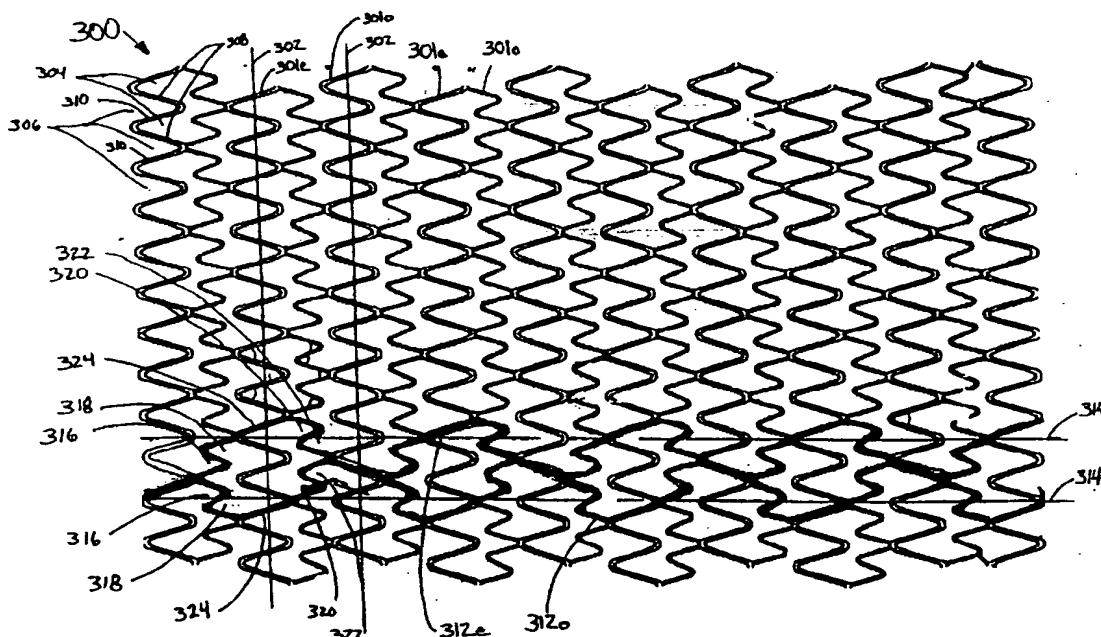
- Pinchasik, Gregory
Herzeliya 46424 (IL)
- Richter, Jacob
Ramat Hasharon 47226 (IL)

(74) Representative: Altenburg, Udo, Dipl.-Phys. et al
Patent- und Rechtsanwälte
Bardehle - Pagenberg - Dost - Altenburg -
Geissler - Isenbruck,
Galileiplatz 1
81679 München (DE)

(54) Longitudinally flexible stent

(57) An intravascular stent especially suited for implanting in curved arterial portions. The stent retains longitudinal flexibility after expansion. The stent is formed of intertwined meander patterns forming triangular cells. The triangular cells are adapted to provide radial sup-

port, and also to provide longitudinal flexibility after expansion. The triangular cells provide increased coverage of a vessel wall. The stent can have different portions adapted to optimize radial support or to optimize longitudinal flexibility. The stent can be adapted to prevent flaring of portions of the stent during insertion.



Description

[0001] The present invention relates generally to stents, which are endoprostheses implanted into vessels within the body, such as blood vessels, to support and hold open the vessels, or to secure and support other endoprostheses in the vessels. In particular, the present invention relates to a stent which is longitudinally flexible before and after expansion.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

[0002] Various stents are known in the art. Typically stents are generally tubular in shape, and are expandable from a relatively small, unexpanded diameter to a larger, expanded diameter. For implantation, the stent is typically mounted on the end of a catheter, with the stent being held on the catheter at its relatively small, unexpanded diameter. By the catheter, the unexpanded stent is directed through the lumen to the intended implantation site. Once the stent is at the intended implantation site, it is expanded, typically either by an internal force, for example by inflating a balloon on the inside of the stent, or by allowing the stent to self-expand, for example by removing a sleeve from around a self-expanding stent, allowing the stent to expand outwardly. In either case, the expanded stent resists the tendency of the vessel to narrow, thereby maintaining the vessel's patency.

[0003] U.S. Patent No. 5,733,303 to Israel et al. ("'303"), which is expressly incorporated by reference, shows a unique stent formed of a tube having a patterned shape which has first and second meander patterns having axes extending in first and second directions. The second meander patterns are intertwined with the first meander patterns to form flexible cells. Stents such as this one are very flexible in their unexpanded state such that they can be tracked easily down tortuous lumens. Upon expansion, these stents provide excellent radial support, stability, and coverage of the vessel wall. These stents are also conformable, in that they adapt to the shape of the vessel wall during implantation.

[0004] One feature of stents with a cellular mesh design such as this one, however, is that they have limited longitudinal flexibility after expansion, which may be a disadvantage in particular applications. This limited longitudinal flexibility may cause stress points at the end of the stent and along the length of the stent. Conventional mesh stents like that shown in U.S. Patent 4,733,665 may simply lack longitudinal flexibility, which is illustrated by Figure 1, a schematic diagram of a conventional stent 202 in a curved vessel 204 and even a

[0005] To implant a stent, it maybe delivered to a desired site by a balloon catheter when the stent is in an unexpanded state. The balloon catheter is then inflated to expand the stent, affixing the stent into place. Due to the high inflation pressures of the balloon -- up to 20 atm -- the balloon causes the curved vessel 204 and even a

longitudinally flexible stent to straighten when it is inflated. If the stent, because of the configuration of its mesh is or becomes relatively rigid after expansion, then the stent remains or tends to remain in the same or substantially the same shape after deflation of the balloon. However, the artery attempts to return to its natural curve (indicated by dashed lines) in Figure 1 with reference to a conventional mesh stent. The mismatch between the natural curve of the artery and the straightened section

5 of the artery with a stent may cause points of stress concentration 206 at the ends of the stent and stress along the entire stent length. The coronary vasculature can impose additional stress on stents because the coronary vasculature moves relatively significant amounts with
10 each heartbeat. For illustration purposes, the difference between the curve of the vessel and the straightened stent has been exaggerated in Figure 1.

[0006] U.S. Patent No. 5,807,404 to Richter, which is expressly incorporated by reference, shows another
20 stent which is especially suited for implantation into curved arterial portions or ostial regions. This stent can include sections adjacent the end of the stent with greater bending flexibility than the remaining axial length of the stent. While this modification at the end of the stent
25 alleviates the stress at the end points, it does not eliminate the stress along the entire length of the stent.

[0007] Various stents are known that retain longitudinal flexibility after expansion. For example, U.S. Patent Nos. 4,886,062 and 5,133,732 to Wiktor ("the Wiktor
30 '062 and '732 patents") show various stents formed of wire wherein the wire is initially formed into a band of zigzags forming a serpentine pattern, and then the zig-zag band is coiled into a helical stent. The stents are expanded by an internal force, for example by inflating
35 a balloon.

[0008] The coiled zig-zag stents that are illustrated in Figures 1 through 6 of the Wiktor '062 and '732 patents are longitudinally flexible both in the expanded and unexpanded condition such that they can be tracked easily
40 down tortuous lumens and such that they conform relatively closely to the compliance of the vessel after deployment. While these stents are flexible, they also have relatively unstable support after expansion. Furthermore, these stents leave large portions of the vessel wall
45 uncovered, allowing tissue and plaque prolapse into the lumen of the vessel.

[0009] Thus, it is desired to have a stent which exhibits longitudinal flexibility before expansion such that it can easily be tracked down tortuous lumens and longitudinal flexibility after expansion such that it can comply
50 with the vessel's natural flexibility and curvature while still providing continuous, stable coverage of a vessel wall that will minimize tissue sag into the lumen.

OBJECTS AND SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0010] Accordingly, an object of the invention is to provide a stent that is longitudinally flexible before expan-

sion so that it can easily be tracked down tortuous vessels and remains longitudinally flexible after expansion such that it will substantially eliminate any stress points by complying with the vessel's flexibility and assuming the natural curve of the vessel.

[0011] Another object of the present invention is to provide a stent that is longitudinally flexible after delivery such that it flexes during the cycles of the heartbeat to reduce cyclic stress at the ends of the stent and along the stent.

[0012] Another object of the present invention is to provide a stent with a closed cell pattern such that it provides good coverage and support to a vessel wall after expansion.

[0013] Other advantages of the present invention will be apparent to those skilled in the art.

[0014] In accordance with these objects, the stent of the present invention is formed to be a tube having a patterned shape which has first and second meander patterns having axes extending in first and second direction wherein the second meander patterns are intertwined with the first meander patterns.

[0015] In accordance with one embodiment of the invention, the intertwined meander patterns form cells which have three points at which the first and second meander patterns meet each other, and which in this sense could be called triangular cells. These three cornered or triangular cells are flexible about the longitudinal axis of the stent after expansion. These triangular cells provide comparable scaffolding and radial strength to that of cells formed by intertwined meander patterns which have four points at which the first and second patterns meet each other, and which in this sense could be called square cells.

[0016] In another embodiment of the invention, bands of cells are provided along the length of a stent. The bands of cells alternate between cells adapted predominantly to enhance radial support with cells that are adapted predominantly to enhance longitudinal flexibility after expansion.

[0017] In another embodiment of the invention, the first meander patterns are adapted to prevent any "flaring out" of loops of the first meander patterns during delivery of the stent.

[0018] A stent according to the invention retains the longitudinal flexibility associated with the '303 cellular stent in its unexpanded state, and has increased longitudinal flexibility in the expanded state. The stent does so without sacrificing scaffolding -- i.e. coverage of the vessel wall -- or radial support.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0019]

Figure 1 shows a schematic diagram of a conventional rigid stent deployed in a curved lumen;

Figure 2 shows a schematic diagram of a stent of the present invention deployed in a curved lumen;

5 Figure 3 shows a pattern for a stent made in accordance with the present invention;

Figure 4 shows an enlarged view of one cell of the pattern of Figure 3;

10 Figure 5 shows a pattern for a stent made in accordance with the present invention;

Figure 6 shows an enlarged view of one cell of the pattern of Figure 5;

15 Figure 7 shows a pattern for a stent made in accordance with the present invention;

20 Figure 8 shows an enlarged view of one cell used in the pattern of Figure 7;

Figure 9 shows an enlarged view of another cell used in Figure 7;

25 Figure 10 shows a schematic comparison of a four cornered or "square cell" and a three cornered or "triangular" cell of the present invention;

30 Figure 11 shows a pattern for a stent constructed according to the principles of the invention which has variable geometry along its length;

35 Figure 12 shows another pattern for a stent constructed according to the principles of the invention;

40 Figure 13 shows another pattern for a stent constructed according to the principles of the invention;

45 Figure 14 shows the elongation of a portion of a horizontal meander pattern formed of NiTi.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

[0020] Figure 2 shows a schematic diagram of a longitudinally flexible stent 208 of the present invention. The stent 208 may be delivered to a curved vessel 210 by a balloon catheter, and implanted in the artery by inflating the balloon. As described before, the balloon causes the artery to straighten upon inflation of the balloon.

50 However, upon deflation of the balloon, the stent 208 assumes the natural curve of the vessel 210 because it is and remains longitudinally flexible after expansion. This reduces any potential stress points at the

ends of the stent and along the length of the stent. Furthermore, because the stent is longitudinally flexible after expansion, the stent will flex longitudinally with the vessel during the cycles caused by a heartbeat. This also reduces any cyclic stress at the ends of the stent and along the length of the stent.

[0021] Figure 3 shows a pattern of a stent according to the present invention. This pattern may be constructed of known materials, and for example stainless steel, but it is particularly suitable to be constructed from NiTi. The pattern can be formed by etching a flat sheet of NiTi into the pattern shown. The flat sheet is formed into a stent by rolling the etched sheet into a tubular shape, and welding the edges of the sheet together to form a tubular stent. The details of this method of forming the stent, which has certain advantages, are disclosed in U. S. Patent Nos. 5,836,964 and 5,997,973, which are hereby expressly incorporated by reference. Other methods known to those of skill in the art such as laser cutting a tube or etching a tube may also be used to construct a stent which uses the present invention. After formation into a tubular shape, a NiTi stent is heat treated, as known by those skilled in the art, to take advantage of the shape memory characteristics of NiTi and its superelasticity.

[0022] The pattern 300 is formed from a plurality of each of two orthogonal meander patterns which patterns are intertwined with each other. The term "meander pattern" is taken herein to describe a periodic pattern about a center line and "orthogonal meander patterns" are patterns whose center lines are orthogonal to each other.

[0023] A meander pattern 301 is a vertical sinusoid having a vertical center line 302. A meander pattern 301 has two loops 304 and 306 per period wherein loops 304 open to the right while loops 306 open to the left. Loops 304 and 306 share common members 308 and 310, where member 308 joins one loop 304 to its following loop 306 and member 308 joins one loop 306 to its following loop 304.

[0024] A meander pattern 312 (two of which have been shaded for reference) is a horizontal pattern having a horizontal center line 314. A horizontal meander pattern 312 also has loops labeled 316, 318, 320, 322, and between the loops of a period is a section labeled 324.

[0025] Vertical meander pattern 301 is provided in odd and even (o and e) versions which are 180N out of phase with each other. Thus, each left opening loop 306 of meander pattern 301o faces a right opening loop 304 of meander pattern 301e and a right opening loop 304 of meander pattern 301o faces a left opening loop 306 of meander pattern 301e.

[0026] The horizontal meander pattern 312 is also provided in odd and even forms. The straight sections 324 of the horizontal meander pattern 312e intersect with every third common member 310 of the even vertical meander pattern 301e. The straight sections 324

of the horizontal meander pattern 312o also intersect with every third common member 310 of the odd vertical meander pattern 301.

[0027] Upon expansion of the stent, the loops of the vertical meander patterns 301 open up in the vertical direction. This causes them to shorten in the horizontal direction. The loops in the horizontal meander pattern 312 open up both in the vertical direction and the horizontal direction, compensating for the shortening of the loops of the vertical meander patterns.

[0028] It should be noted that the horizontal meander pattern 312 in the present invention avoids foreshortening in a self-expanding stent in a particularly effective manner. As shown in Fig. 14, because of the configuration of the horizontal meander pattern 312, when the stent is compressed from an expanded position to a crimped position, the length of the horizontal meander pattern naturally shrinks. Consequently, when the stent expands, the horizontal meander pattern elongates and compensates for the shortening of the vertical meander pattern as the vertical meander pattern expands. In contrast, a horizontal meander pattern with such shapes as N-shapes will not naturally shrink longitudinally when compressed.

[0029] A stent formed from the pattern of Figure 3 and made of NiTi is particularly well suited for use in the carotid artery or other lumens subject to an outside pressure. One reason is that because the stent is formed of NiTi, it is reboundable, which is a desirable property for stents placed in the carotid artery. The other reason is that the stent of Figure 3 offers excellent scaffolding, which is particularly important in the carotid artery. Scaffolding is especially important in the carotid artery because dislodged particles in the artery may embolize and cause a stroke.

[0030] Figure 4 is an expanded view of one flexible cell 500 of the pattern of Figure 3. Each flexible cell 500 includes: a first member 501 having a first end 502 and a second end 503; a second member 504 having a first end 505 and a second end 506; a third member 507 having a first end 508 and a second end 509; and a fourth member 510 having a first end 511 and a second end 512. The first end 502 of the first member 501 is joined to the first end 505 of the second member 504 by a first curved member 535 to form a first loop 550, the second end 506 of the second member 504 is joined to the second end 509 of the third member 508 by a second curved member 536, and the first end 508 of the third member 507 is joined to the first end 511 of the fourth member 510 by a third curved member 537 to form a second loop 531. The first loop 530 defines a first angle 543. The second loop 531 defines a second angle 544. Each cell 500 also includes a fifth member 513 having a first end 514 and a second end 515; a sixth member 516 having a first end 517 and a second end 518; a seventh member 519 having a first end 520 and a second end 521; an eighth member 522 having a first end 523 and a second end 524; a ninth member 525 having a

first end 526 and a second end 527; and a tenth member having a first end 529 and a second end 530. The first end 514 of the fifth member 513 is joined to the second end 503 of the first member 501 at second junction point 542, the second end 515 of the fifth member 513 is joined to the second end 518 of the sixth member by a curved member 539 to form a third loop 532, the first end 517 of the sixth member 516 is joined to the first end 520 of the seventh member 519 by a fifth curved member 548, the second end 521 of the seventh member 519 is joined to the second end 524 of the eighth member 522 at third junction point 540 to form a fourth loop 533, the first end 523 of the eighth member 522 is joined to the first end 526 of the ninth member 525 by a sixth curved member 549, the second end 526 of the ninth member 525 is joined to the second end 530 of the tenth member 528 by a seventh curved member 541 to form a fifth loop 534, and the first end 529 of the tenth member 528 is joined to the second end 512 of the fourth member 510. The third loop 532 defines a third angle 545. The fourth loop 533 defines a fourth angle 546. The fifth loop 534 defines a fifth angle 547.

[0031] In the embodiment shown in Fig. 4, the first member 501, the third member 507, the sixth member 516, the eighth member 522, and the tenth member 528 have substantially the same angular orientation to the longitudinal axis of the stent and the second member 504, the fourth member 510, the fifth member 513, the seventh member 519, and the ninth member 512 have substantially the same angular orientation to the longitudinal axis of the stent. In the embodiment shown in Figure 4, the lengths of the first, second, third and fourth members 501, 504, 507, 510 are substantially equal. The lengths of the fifth, sixth, seventh, eighth, ninth and tenth members 513, 516, 519, 522, 525, 528 are also substantially equal. Other embodiments where lengths of individual members are tailored for specific applications, materials of construction or methods of delivery are also possible, and may be preferable for them.

[0032] Preferably, the first, second, third, and fourth members 501, 504, 507, 510 have a width that is greater than the width of the fifth, sixth, seventh, eighth, ninth, and tenth members 513, 516, 519, 522, 525, 528 in that cell. The differing widths of the first, second, third, and fourth members and the fifth, sixth, seventh, eighth, ninth, and tenth members with respect to each other contribute to the overall flexibility and resistance to radial compression of the cell. The widths of the various members can be tailored for specific applications. Preferably, the fifth, sixth, seventh, eighth, ninth, and tenth members are optimized predominantly to enable longitudinal flexibility, both before and after expansion, while the first, second, third, and fourth members are optimized predominantly to enable sufficient resistance to radial compression to hold a vessel open. Although specific members are optimized to predominantly enable a desired characteristic, all the portions of the cell interactively cooperate and contribute to the characteristics

of the stent.

[0033] Figures 5 and 6 show a pattern and an expanded view of one cell of an embodiment of the present invention which is specially adapted for a stent made of stainless steel. The pattern is similar to the pattern of Figures 3 and 4, and the same reference numerals are used to indicate the generally corresponding parts.

[0034] In this embodiment of the invention, for example, the second loops 531 are made stronger by shortening the third and fourth members 507, 510. This helps assure that the second loops do not "flare out" during delivery of the stent through tortuous anatomy. This "flaring out" is not a concern with NiTi stents which are covered by a sheath during delivery.

[0035] Furthermore, the length of the members in this embodiment may be shorter than the length of the corresponding members in the embodiment illustrated in Figures 3 and 4. Typically, the amount of strain allowed in a self-expanding NiTi stent may be around 10%. In a stainless steel stent, the amount of strain allowed typically may be 20% or greater. Therefore, to facilitate stents made of NiTi and stents made of stainless steel expanding to comparable diameters, the members of the NiTi stent may be longer than the members of a stainless steel stent.

[0036] Figure 7 illustrates another aspect of the present invention. The stent of Figure 7 is also constructed from orthogonal meander patterns 301, 302. The meander patterns form a series of interlocking cells 50, 700 of two types. The first type of cell 50 is taught by U.S. Patent No. 5,733,303. These cells are arranged so that they form alternating bands 704 of first type of cells 50 and bands 706 of the second type of cells 700.

[0037] As seen in Figure 8 and particularly with respect to the cell labeled for ease of description, each of the '303 cells 50 has a first longitudinal apex 100 and a second longitudinal end 78. Each cell 50 also is provided with a first longitudinal end 77 and a second longitudinal apex 104 disposed at the second longitudinal end 78. Each cell 50 also includes a first member 51 having a longitudinal component having a first end 52 and a second end 53; a second member 54 having a longitudinal component having a first end 55 and a second end 56; a third member 57 having a longitudinal component having a first end 58 and a second end 59; and a fourth member 60 having a longitudinal component having a first end 61 and a second end 62. The stent also includes a first loop or curved member 63 defining a first angle 64 disposed between the first end 52 of the first member 51 and the first end 55 of the second member 54. A second loop or curved member 65 defining a second angle 66 is disposed between the second end 59 of the third member 57 and the second end 62 of the fourth member 60 and is disposed generally opposite to the first loop 63. A first flexible compensating member (or a section of a longitudinal meander pattern) 67 having curved portion and two legs with a first end 68 and a second end 69 is disposed between the first

member 51 and the third member 57 with the first end 68 of the first flexible compensating member 67 joined to and communicating with the second end 53 of the first member 51 and the second end 69 of the first flexible compensating member 67 joined to and communicating with the first end 58 of the third member 57. The first end 68 and the second end 69 are disposed a variable longitudinal distance 70 from each other. A second flexible compensating member (or, a section of a longitudinal meander pattern) 71 having a first end 72 and a second end 73 is disposed between the second member 54 and the fourth member 60. The first end 72 of the second flexible compensating member 71 is joined to and communicates with the second end 56 of the second member 54 and the second end 73 of the second flexible compensating member 71 is joined to and communicates with the first end 61 of the fourth member 60. The first end 72 and the second end 73 are disposed a variable longitudinal distance 74 from each other. In this embodiment, the first and second flexible compensating members, and particularly the curved portion thereof, 67 and 71 are arcuate.

[0038] The second type of cell 700 is illustrated in Figure 9 and the same reference numerals are used to indicate generally corresponding areas of the cell. The apices 100, 104 of the second type of cell 700 are offset circumferentially. Also, each flexible compensating member 67, 71 includes: a first portion or leg 79 with a first end 80 and a second end 81; a second portion or leg 82 with a first end 83 and a second end 84; and a third portion or leg 85 with the first end 86 and a second end 87, with the second end 81 and the second end 84 being joined by a curved member and the first end 83 and the first end 86 being joined by a curved member. The first end of a flexible compensating member 67, 71 is the same as the first end 80 of the first portion 79, and the second end of a flexible compensating member 67, 71 is the same as the second end 87 of the third portion 85. A first area of inflection 88 is disposed between the second end 81 of the first portion 79 and the second end 84 of the second portion 82 where the curved portion joining them lies. A second area of inflection 89 is disposed between the first end 83 of the second portion 82 and the first end 86 of the third portion 85 where the curved portion joining them lies.

[0039] While Figure 7 illustrates a pattern of alternating bands of cells, the stent may be optimized for a particular usage by tailoring the configuration of the bands. For example, the middle band of the second type of cells 700 may instead be formed of cells 50, or vice versa. The second type of cells in Figure 7 may also utilize the cell configurations described with respect to Figures 4 and 6. The cell configurations of Figures 4 and 6 provide the advantage that they will not cause any torque of one portion of the cell relative to another portion of the cell about the longitudinal axis of the stent upon expansion, which may happen when the second type of cells 700 expand, a torque which could cause a stent to deform,

and stick out.

[0040] As illustrated in Figure 7, all of the flexible compensating members are arranged so that the path of the flexible compensating members, from left to right, travels in a generally downward direction. The cells 700 can also be arranged so that the flexible compensating members in one band are arranged in a generally upward direction, and the flexible compensating members in an adjacent band are arranged in a generally downward direction. One skilled in the art can easily make these modifications.

[0041] Figure 10 is a schematic representation comparing the cells 804 of the present invention, which have three points where the intertwined first and second meander patterns meet and are in that sense three cornered or triangular cells, with cells 802 of the '303 stent which have four points where the intertwined first and second meander patterns meet and are in that sense four cornered or square cells. More particularly, on the left side of Figure 10, a pair of vertical meander patterns 806, 826 are joined by members 808, 810, 812 (which are sections of longitudinal meander patterns) to form a plurality of three cornered or triangular cells 804. By triangular cell, it is meant that there are three sections 810, 812, 814, each having loop portions and three associated points 816, 818, 820 of their joining, forming each cell.

[0042] On the right side of Figure 10, a pair of vertical meander patterns 822, 824 are joined together compensating members 828, 830, 832, 834 (which are sections of a longitudinal meander) to form a plurality of square cells 804. By square cell, it is meant that there are four sections, each having loop portions, and four associated points of their joining, forming each cell. For example, the shaded cell 802 is formed from four sections 832, 836, 830, 838, with four associated points of their joining 840, 842, 844, 846.

[0043] Both the square cell and the triangular cell have two kinds of sections with loops: The first kind of loop containing section is formed from a vertical meander pattern and is optimized predominantly to enable radial support. The second kind of loop containing section is optimized predominantly to enable flexibility along the longitudinal axis of the stent. Although each loop containing section is optimized predominantly to enable a desired characteristic of the stent, the sections are interconnected and cooperate to define the characteristics of the stent. Therefore, the first kind of loop containing section contributes to the longitudinal flexibility of the stent, and the second kind of loop containing section contributes to the radial support of the stent.

[0044] In the square cell 802, it can be seen that the second kind of loop containing sections 830, 832 each have one inflection point 848, 850. In the triangular cell, 55 the loop containing sections 810, 812 each have two inflection point areas 852, 854, 856, 858. The higher number of inflection points allows more freedom to deform after expansion of the stent and distributes the de-

formation over a longer section, thus, reducing the maximal strain along these loop containing sections.

[0045] Furthermore, it can be seen that a square cell 802 is generally more elongated along the longitudinal axis of the stent than a triangular cell 804, which is generally more elongated along the circumference of the stent. This also contributes to higher flexibility after expansion.

[0046] If the first meander patterns 806, 822, 824, 826 of both types of cells are constructed identically and spaced apart by the same amount, the area of a triangular cell 804 is the same as a square cell 802. This can be more readily understood with reference to a band of cells around the circumference of a stent. Each band will encompass the same area, and each band will have the same number of cells. Accordingly, the area of each cell in one band formed of square cells will be the same as the area of each cell in another band formed of triangular cells.

[0047] Although the areas of the cells are equal, the perimeter of the triangular cell is larger than the perimeter of the square cell. Therefore, in comparison to a square cell, a triangular cell offers increased coverage of a vessel wall.

[0048] In the particular embodiments described above, the stent is substantially uniform over its entire length. However, other applications where portions of the stent are adapted to provide different characteristics are also possible. For example, as shown in Figure 11, a band of cells 850 may be designed to provide different flexibility characteristics or different radial compression characteristics than the remaining bands of cells by altering the widths and lengths of the members making up that band. Or, the stent may be adapted to provide increased access to a side branch lumen by providing at least one cell 852 which is larger in size than the remaining cells, or by providing an entire band of cells 854 which are larger in size than the other bands of cells. Or, the stent may be designed to expand to different diameters along the length of the stent. The stent may also be treated after formation of the stent by coating the stent with a medicine, plating the stent with a protective material, plating the stent with a radiopaque material, or covering the stent with a material.

[0049] Figures 12 and 13 show alternative patterns for a stent constructed according to the principles of the present invention. The stent shown in Fig. 12 has two bands of cells 856 located at each of the proximal end 860 and distal end 862. The cells that form the bands of cells 856 located at the ends of the stent are '303 type cells. The remaining cells in the stent are the same as described with respect to the cells 500 depicted in Fig. 6. The stent shown in Fig. 13 has alternating bands of cells 864, 866, 868. The first type of band of cells 864 is composed of '303 type cells. The second and third types of bands of cells 866, 868 are formed of the cells described with respect to the cells 500 depicted in Fig. 4. Of course, any various combination of cells may be

used in the present invention.

[0050] Thus, what is described is a longitudinally flexible stent that utilizes a closed cell structure to provide excellent coverage of the vessel wall. The general concepts described herein can be utilized to form stents with different configurations than the particular embodiments described herein. For example, the general concepts can be used to form bifurcated stents. It will be appreciated by persons skilled in the art that the present invention is not limited to what has been particularly shown and described above. Rather, the scope of the present invention is defined by the claims which follow.

15 Claims

1. A stent for holding open a blood vessel formed of a plurality of triangular cells, each triangular cell comprising:

20 a first loop containing section, the first loop containing section arranged generally in the circumferential direction;

25 a second loop containing section joined to the first loop containing section at a first junction point; and

30 a third loop containing section joined to the first loop containing section at a second junction point and joined to the second loop containing section at a third junction point.

2. A stent for holding open a blood vessel formed of a plurality of triangular cells, each triangular cell comprising:

35 a first loop containing section, the first loop containing section arranged generally in the circumferential direction;

40 a second loop containing section joined to the first loop containing section at a first junction point; and

45 a third loop containing section joined to the first loop containing section at a second junction point and joined to the second loop containing section at a third junction point,

50 wherein the first loop containing section is formed by a portion of a first meander pattern and the second and third loop containing sections are formed by portions of one or more second meander patterns.

55 3. A stent according to claim 1 or 2, wherein the first loop containing section is relatively adapted to en-

able radial support, and the second and third loop containing sections are relatively adapted to enable longitudinal flexibility.

4. A stent according to one of claims 1 to 3, wherein the first loop containing section has wider struts than the second and third loop containing sections.
5. A stent according to one of claims 1 to 4, wherein the first loop containing section has two loops.
6. A stent according to one of claims 1 to 5, wherein the second loop containing section has two loops.
7. A stent according to one of claims 1 to 6, wherein the third loop containing section has two loops.
8. A stent according to one of claims 1 to 7, wherein the stent is made of stainless steel.
9. A stent according to one of claims 1 to 8, wherein at least one of the legs for a loop of the first loop containing section is shorter than other legs for a loop of the first loop containing section.
10. A stent according to one of claims 1 to 9, wherein the second and third junction point are circumferentially aligned.
11. A stent according to one of claims 1 to 10, wherein each cell in the stent encompasses the same area.
12. A stent according to one of claims 1 to 11, wherein the cell is arranged so that when expanded a length of the cell along a circumference of the stent is longer than a length of a cell along the longitudinal axis of the stent.
13. A stent according to one of claims 1 to 12, wherein the stent is made from NiTi.
14. A stent according to one of claims 1 to 13, wherein a cell of the stent is symmetrical about a line parallel to a longitudinal axis of the stent.
15. A stent according to one of claims 1 to 14, wherein at least one cell with a larger size is provided to allow access to a side branch lumen.
16. A stent according to one of claims 1 to 15, wherein the cells are arranged into a plurality of bands, and the cells in one band are larger than the cells in the remaining band so as to provide access to a side branch in a vessel.
17. A stent according to one of claims 1 to 16, wherein the cells are arranged into a plurality of bands and the cells in at least one band are adapted to have a

different radial force than the cells in the remaining bands.

5. A stent according to one of claims 1 to 17, wherein the cells are arranged into a plurality of bands and the cells in at least one band are adapted to have a different longitudinal flexibility than the cells in the remaining bands.
10. 19. A stent according to one of claims 1 to 18, wherein the cells are arranged into a plurality of bands and the cells in at least one band are adapted so that upon expansion of the stent the band expands to a diameter which is different than the diameter of the remaining portions of the stent.
15. 20. A stent according to one of claims 1 to 19, wherein the cells are arranged into a plurality of bands, and the number of cells in at least one band is different than the number of cells in another band.
20. 21. A stent according to one of claims 1 to 20, wherein the stent is finished in one of the following ways: plating with a radiopaque material, plating with a protective material, embedding with medicine, or covering with a material.
25. 22. A stent for widening a vessel in the human body comprising:
30 a plurality of first meander patterns;
35 a plurality of second meander patterns intertwined with the first meander patterns to form triangular cells.
23. A stent for widening a vessel in the human body comprising:
40 a plurality of first meander patterns;
45 a plurality of second meander patterns intertwined with the first meander patterns to form triangular cells, said triangular cells having three sections with loop portions therein and being joined to one another at only three junction points.
50. 24. A stent according to claim 22 or 23, wherein the first meander patterns are comprised of:
55 even first meander patterns; and
odd first meander patterns which are 180° out of phase with the even first meander patterns, the odd first meander patterns occurring between every two even first meander patterns.

25. A stent according to one of claims 22 to 24, wherein the second meander patterns are comprised of:
even second meander patterns; and
5 odd second meander pattern occurring between every two even second meander patterns.

26. A stent according to one of claims 22 to 25, wherein each of the triangular cells is comprised of a first loop containing section, a second loop containing section, and a third loop containing section.

27. A stent according to one of claims 22 to 26, wherein the first loop containing section is formed by a portion of a first meander pattern and the second and third loop containing sections are formed by portions of one or more second meander patterns.

28. A stent according to one of claims 22 to 27, wherein the first loop containing section includes at least one leg of a free loop which is shorter than other legs of loops in the loop containing section.

29. A stent according to one of claims 22 to 28, wherein the first loop containing section is wider than the second and third loop containing sections.

30. A stent according to one of claims 22 to 29, wherein the first meander pattern has two loops per period.

31. A stent according to one of claims 22 to 30, wherein the second meander pattern has four loops per period.

32. A stent according to one of claims 22 to 31, wherein the first and second meander patterns are substantially orthogonal.

33. A stent according to one of claims 22 to 32, wherein the first loop containing section has two loops facing toward the interior of the cell.

34. A stent according to one of claims 22 to 33, wherein the second and third loop containing sections each have two loops.

35. A stent according to one of claims 22 to 34, wherein the loops of the second and third loop containing sections are adapted to compensate for the tendency of the loops of the first loop containing section to foreshorten when the stent is expanded.

36. A stent according to one of claims 22 to 35, wherein one of the loops of the first loop section is a free loop which is shorter than the other loop of the first loop section.

37. A stent according to one of claims 22 to 36, wherein the odd and even second meander portions have portions in common wherein said meanders run in the same direction.

38. A stent according to one of claims 22 to 37, wherein the first and second meander patterns have portions in common wherein said meander patterns run in the same direction.

39. A multicellular stent for holding open a lumen, comprising:
a plurality of even and odd vertical meander patterns, the odd vertical meander patterns being located between every two even vertical meander patterns and being out of phase with the even vertical meander patterns,
20 a plurality of even and odd horizontal meander patterns, the odd horizontal meander patterns being located between every two even horizontal meander patterns,
25 wherein the vertical meander patterns are intertwined with the horizontal meander patterns to form a plurality of triangular cells.

40. A multicellular stent for holding open a lumen, comprising:
a plurality of even and odd vertical meander patterns, the odd vertical meander patterns being located between every two even vertical meander patterns and being out of phase with the even vertical meander patterns,
30 a plurality of even and odd horizontal meander patterns, the odd horizontal meander patterns being located between every two even horizontal meander patterns,
35 wherein the vertical meander patterns are intertwined with the horizontal meander patterns to form a plurality of triangular cells, said triangular cells having three sections with loop portions therein and being joined to one another at only three junction points.

41. A multicellular stent according to claim 39 or 40, wherein the triangular cells are formed by a first loop containing section, a second loop containing section connected to the first loop containing section, and a third loop containing section connected to the first and second loop containing section.

42. A multicellular stent according to one of claims 39 to 41, wherein the first loop containing section is

formed from a portion of a vertical meander pattern.

43. A multicellular stent according to one of claims 39 to 42, wherein the second and third loop containing sections are formed from portions of one or more horizontal meander patterns. 5

44. A multicellular stent according to one of claims 39 to 43, wherein members forming the first loop containing section are wider than members forming the second and third loop containing sections. 10

45. A multicellular stent according to one of claims 39 to 44, wherein the first loop containing section forms two loops facing toward the interior of the cell.

46. A multicellular stent according to one of claims 39 to 45, wherein the second loop containing section forms one loop facing toward the interior of the cell.

47. A multicellular stent according to one of claims 39 to 46, wherein the third loop containing section forms one loop facing toward the interior of the cell.

48. A multicellular stent according to one of claims 39 to 47, wherein the stent is made of stainless steel. 25

49. A multicellular stent according to one of claims 39 to 48, wherein the first loop containing section includes one free loop. 30

50. A multicellular stent according to one of claims 39 to 49, wherein one leg of the free loop is shorter than the other leg of the loop. 35

51. A multicellular stent according to one of claims 39 to 50, wherein the length of the second loop containing section is equal to the length of the third loop containing section.

52. A multicellular stent according to one of claims 39 to 51, wherein each triangular cell of the stent encompasses the same area.

53. A multicellular stent according to one of claims 39 to 52, wherein the width of members forming the second loop containing section and the width of members forming the third loop containing section are the same.

54. A multicellular stent comprising; 50

a plurality of bands of first cells, each first cell including a first loop disposed generally longitudinally opposite a second loop and a first pair of flexible compensating members joined to the cell sections containing the first and second loop;

55

a plurality of bands of second cells, each second cell including a third loop disposed generally longitudinally opposite a fourth loop and a second pair of flexible members joined to the cell sections containing the third and fourth loops to form a cell, the bands of second cells interspersed with the bands of first cells, wherein the first loop and the second loop are substantially aligned along a longitudinal axis of the stent, and wherein the third loop and the fourth loop are offset along the longitudinal axis.

55. A multicellular stent according to claim 54 wherein the loops of the cell are wider than the flexible members of the cell so that the loops provide more radial support.

56. A multicellular stent according to claim 54 or 55 wherein each flexible member of the second pair of flexible members includes:

a first portion with a first end and a second end;

a second portion with a first end and a second end;

a third portion with a first end and a second end;

a curved portion with a first area of inflection disposed between the second end of the first portion and the second end of the second portion; and

a curved portion with a second area of inflection disposed between the first end of the second portion and the first end of the third portion.

57. A multicellular stent according to one of claims 54 to 56, wherein each flexible member of the first pair of flexible members includes a flexible arcuate compensating member.

58. A multicellular stent according to one of claims 54 to 57, wherein the bands of the first cells alternate with the bands of the second cells.

59. A multicellular stent according to one of claims 54 to 58, wherein the bands of the cells are chosen so as to produce sections of the stent with increased radial rigidity.

60. A multicellular stent according to one of claims 54 to 59, wherein the bands of cells at the ends of the stents are adapted to be more longitudinally flexible than the bands of cells in the remainder of the stent.

61. A multicellular stent according to one of claims 54 to 60, wherein the stent is made from either stainless steel or NiTi.

62. A multicellular stent comprising:

a plurality of bands of square cells, each square cell including a first loop disposed generally longitudinally opposite a second loop, and a first pair of flexible compensating members joined to the legs of the first and second loop;

a plurality of bands of triangular cells, each triangular cell comprising a first loop containing section arranged generally in the circumferential direction, a second loop containing section connected to the first loop containing section, and a third loop containing section connected to the first loop containing section and the second loop containing section,

wherein the bands of triangular cells are interspersed with the bands of square cells to form the stent.

63. A multicellular stent according to claim 62, wherein the bands of the square cells alternate with the bands of the triangular cells.

64. A multicellular stent according to claim 62 or 63, wherein the bands of cells at the ends of the stents are adapted to be more longitudinally flexible than the bands of cells in the remainder of the stent.

65. A multicellular stent according to one of claims 62 to 64, wherein the first loop containing section has two loops facing the interior of the cell.

66. A multicellular stent according to one of claims 62 to 65, wherein the second and third loop containing sections each have at least one loop facing the interior of the cell.

67. A multicellular stent according to one of claims 62 to 66, wherein first and second loop are formed of members which are wider than the pair of flexible compensating members.

68. A multicellular stent according to one of claims 62 to 67, wherein the first loop is formed of members which are wider than members forming the second and third loop.

69. A multicellular stent according to one of claims 62 to 68, wherein the first loop containing section has some legs of loops which are shorter than other legs of loops.

5

10

15

20

25

30

35

40

45

50

55

70. An expandable stent comprising a plurality of enclosed flexible spaces, each of the plurality of enclosed flexible spaces including:

- a) a first member having a first end and a second end;
- b) a second member having a first end and a second end;
- c) a third member having a first end and a second end;
- d) a fourth member having a first end and a second end; the first end of the first member communicating with the first end of the second member, the second end of the second member communicating with the second end of the third member, and the first end of the third member communicating with the first end of the fourth member;
- e) the first member and the second member with the curved portion at their ends forming a first loop;
- f) the third member and the fourth member with the curved portion at their ends forming a second loop;
- g) a fifth member having a first end and a second end;
- h) a sixth member having a first end and a second end;
- i) a seventh member having a first end and a second end;
- j) an eighth member having a first end and a second end;
- k) a ninth member having a first end and a second end; and
- l) a tenth member having a first end and a second end, the first end of the fifth member communicating with the second end of the first member, the second end of the fifth member communicating with the second end of the sixth member, the first end of the sixth member communicating with the first end of the seventh member, the second end of the seventh member communicating with the second end of the eighth member, the first end of the eighth member communicating with the first end of the ninth member, the second end of the ninth member communicating with the second end of the tenth member;

member, and the first end of the tenth member communicating with the second end of the fourth member;

m) the fifth member and the sixth member with the curved portion at their ends forming a third loop;

n) the seventh member and the eighth member with the curved portion at their ends forming a fourth loop; and

o) the ninth member and the tenth member with the curved portion at their ends forming a fifth loop.

71. The stent of claim 70, wherein the first member, the third member, the sixth member, the eighth member, and the tenth member have substantially the same angular orientation to the longitudinal axis of the stent and the second member, the fourth member, the fifth member, the seventh member, and the ninth member have substantially the same angular orientation to the longitudinal axis of the stent.

72. The stent of claim 70 or 71, wherein at least one of the members in at least one of the plurality of spaces has a length that is greater than the length of the other members in that space.

73. The stent according to one of claims 70 to 72, wherein at least one of the first, second, third, and fourth members in at least one of the plurality of spaces has a length that is longer than the length of at least one of the fifth, sixth, seventh, eighth, ninth, and tenth members in that space.

74. The stent according to one of claims 70 to 73, wherein at least one of the first, second, third, and fourth members in at least one of the plurality of spaces has a length that is about twice the length of at least one of the fifth, sixth, seventh, eighth, ninth, and tenth members in that space.

75. The stent according to one of claims 70 to 74, wherein at least one of the first, second, third and fourth members in at least one of the plurality of spaces has a length that is substantially equal to the length of at least one of the fifth, sixth, seventh, eighth, ninth, and tenth members in that space.

76. The stent according to one of claims 70 to 75, wherein the first, second, third, and fourth members in at least one of the plurality of spaces have a width that is different than the width of the fifth, sixth, seventh, eighth, ninth, and tenth members in that space.

77. The stent according to one of claims 70 to 76, wherein the first, second, third, and fourth members in at least one of the plurality of spaces have a width that is greater than the width of the fifth, sixth, seventh, eighth, ninth, and tenth members in that space.

78. The stent according to one of claims 70 to 77, wherein at least one member in at least one of the plurality of spaces has a width that is greater than the other members in that space.

79. The stent according to one of claims 70 to 78, wherein at least one member in at least one of the plurality of spaces has a width that is greater than the other members in that space.

80. The stent according to one of claims 70 to 79, wherein at least that member having the greatest length in that space is joined to an adjacent member which extends in an adjacent space.

81. The stent according to one of claims 70 to 80, wherein a substantial portion of each of the members is substantially straight.

82. The stent according to one of claims 70 to 81, wherein the members are comprised of metal.

83. The stent according to one of claims 70 to 82, wherein the metal is selected from the group consisting of stainless steel and nitinol.

84. The stent according to one of claims 70 to 83, wherein the first, second, third, and fourth members and the fifth, sixth, seventh, eighth, ninth, and tenth members are provided with different flexibilities with respect to each other.

85. The stent according to one of claims 70 to 84, wherein the first, second, third, and fourth members are more flexible than the fifth, sixth, seventh, eighth, ninth, and tenth members.

86. The stent according to one of claims 70 to 85, wherein the fifth, sixth, seventh, eighth, ninth, and tenth member patterns are more flexible than the first, second, third, and fourth members.

87. The stent according to one of claims 70 to 86, wherein at least one portion of at least one of the first, second, third, and fourth members and at least one portion of at least one of the fifth, sixth, seventh, eighth, ninth, and tenth members are provided with different flexibilities with respect to each other.

88. The stent according to one of claims 70 to 87, wherein at least one portion of at least one of the

first, second, third, and fourth members is provided with at least one portion that is more flexible than at least one portion of at least one of the fifth, sixth, seventh, eighth, ninth, and tenth members.

89. The stent according to one of claims 70 to 88, wherein at least one portion of at least one of the fifth, sixth, seventh, eighth, ninth, and tenth members is provided with at least one portion that is more flexible than at least one portion of at least one of the first, second, third, and fourth members. 5

90. The stent according to one of claims 70 to 89, wherein the first, second, third, and fourth members and the fifth, sixth, seventh, eighth, ninth, and tenth members are provided with different resistances to radial compression with respect to each other. 10

91. The stent according to one of claims 70 to 90, wherein the first, second, third, and fourth members have a greater resistance to radial compression than the fifth, sixth, seventh, eighth, ninth, and tenth members. 15

92. The stent according to one of claims 70 to 91, wherein the fifth, sixth, seventh, eighth, ninth, and tenth members have a greater resistance to radial compression than the first, second, third, and fourth members. 20

93. The stent according to one of claims 70 to 92, wherein at least one portion of at least one of the first, second, third, and fourth members and at least one portion of at least one of the fifth, sixth, seventh, eighth, ninth, and tenth members are provided with different resistances to radial compression with respect to each other. 25

94. The stent according to one of claims 70 to 93, wherein at least one portion of at least one of the plurality of the first, second, third, and fourth members is provided with at least one portion that has a greater resistance to radial compression than at least one portion of at least one of the fifth, sixth, seventh, eighth, ninth, and tenth members. 30

95. The stent according to one of claims 70 to 94, wherein at least one portion of at least one of the fifth, sixth, seventh, eighth, ninth, and tenth members is provided with at least one portion that has a greater resistance to radial compression than at least one portion of at least one of the first, second, third, and fourth members. 35

96. A stent comprising a matrix of cells, substantially as depicted in any of Figures 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9 or 11. 40

97. A stent comprising a matrix of cells, wherein the

cells are selected from one or more of the cells substantially as depicted in Figures 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9 or 11. 45

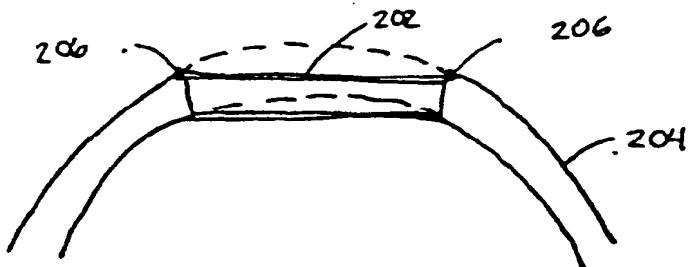


FIG. 1

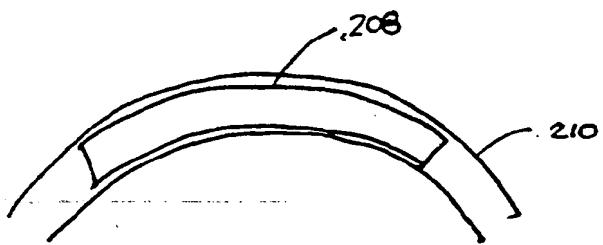
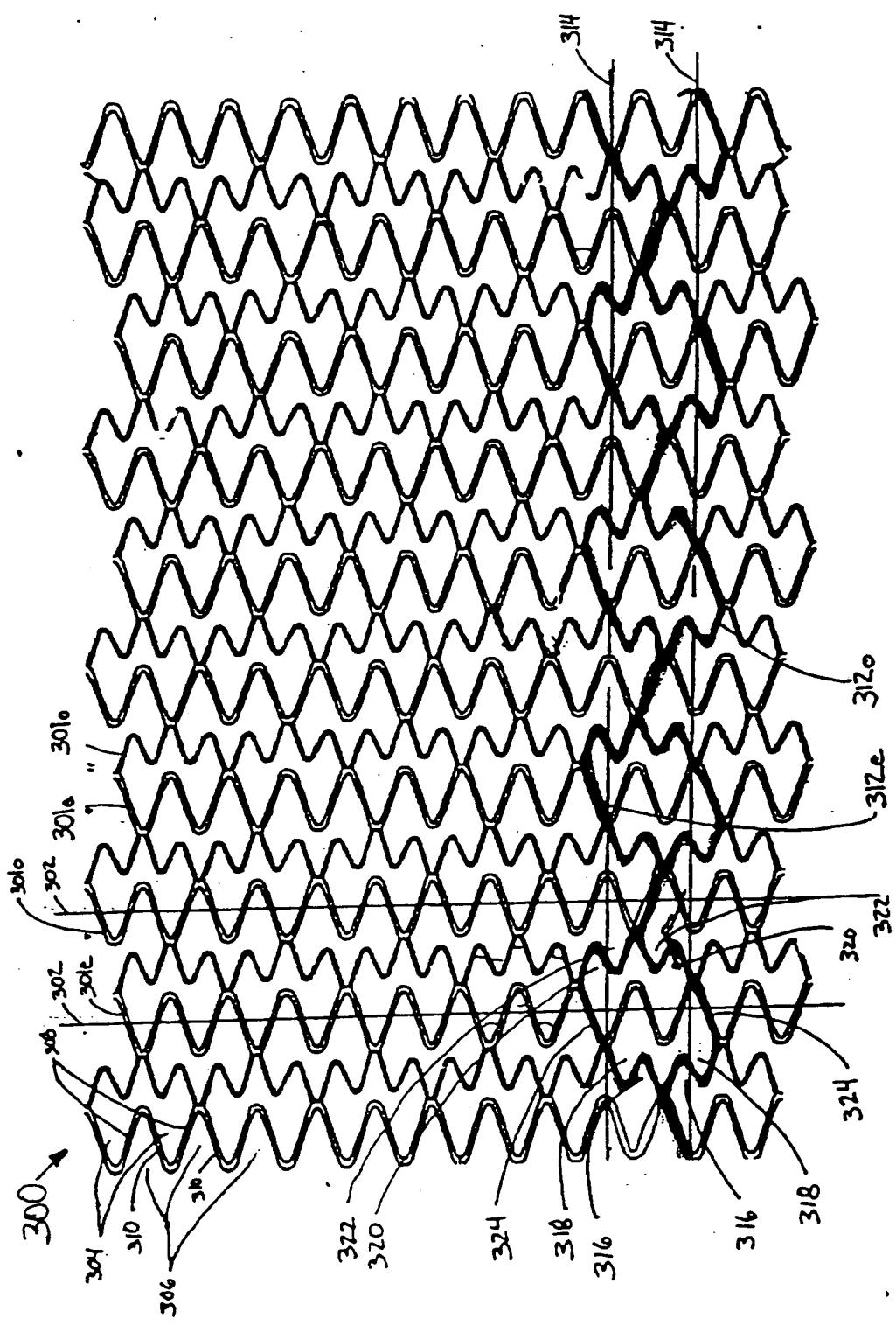
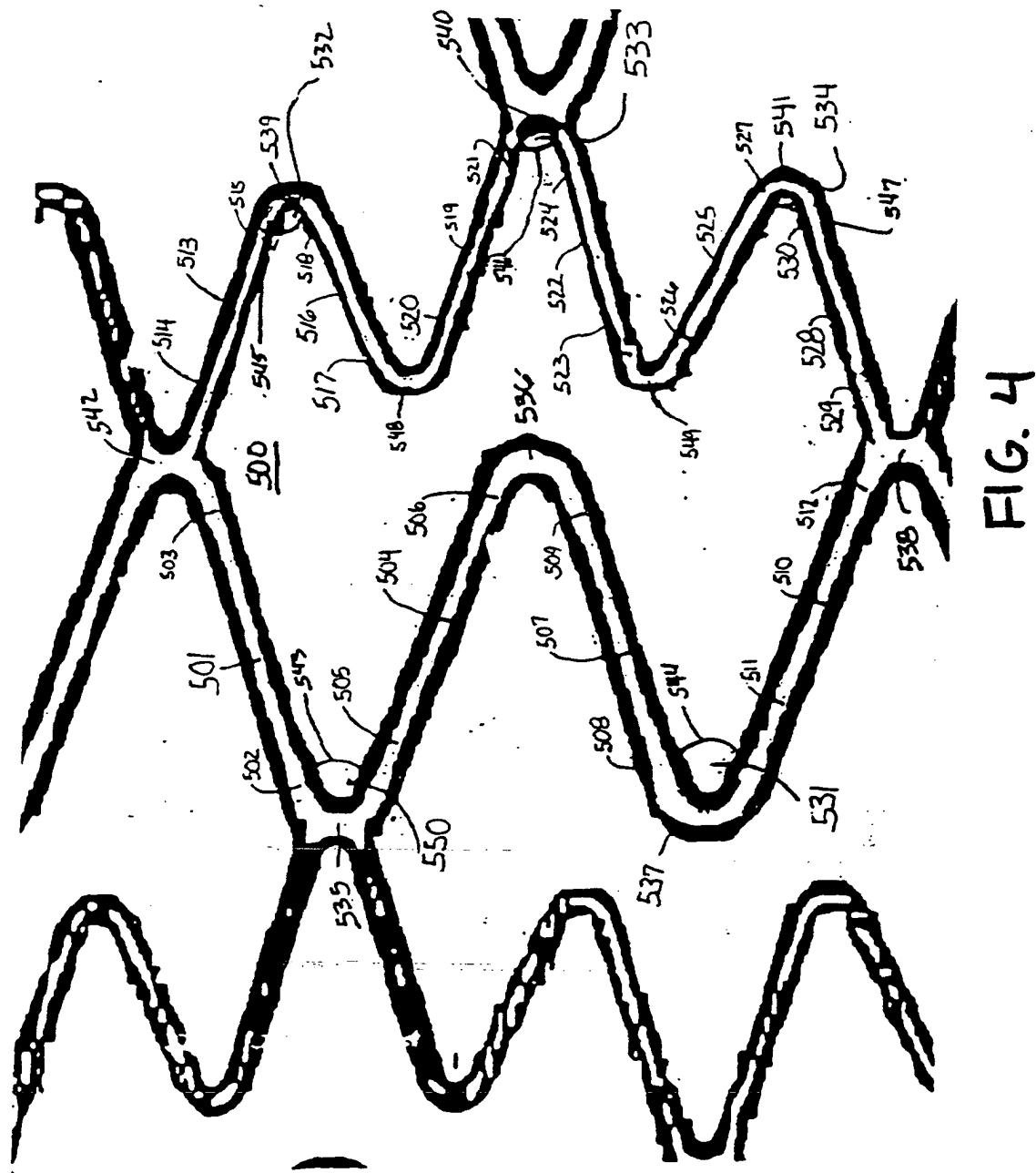


FIG. 2



三
四



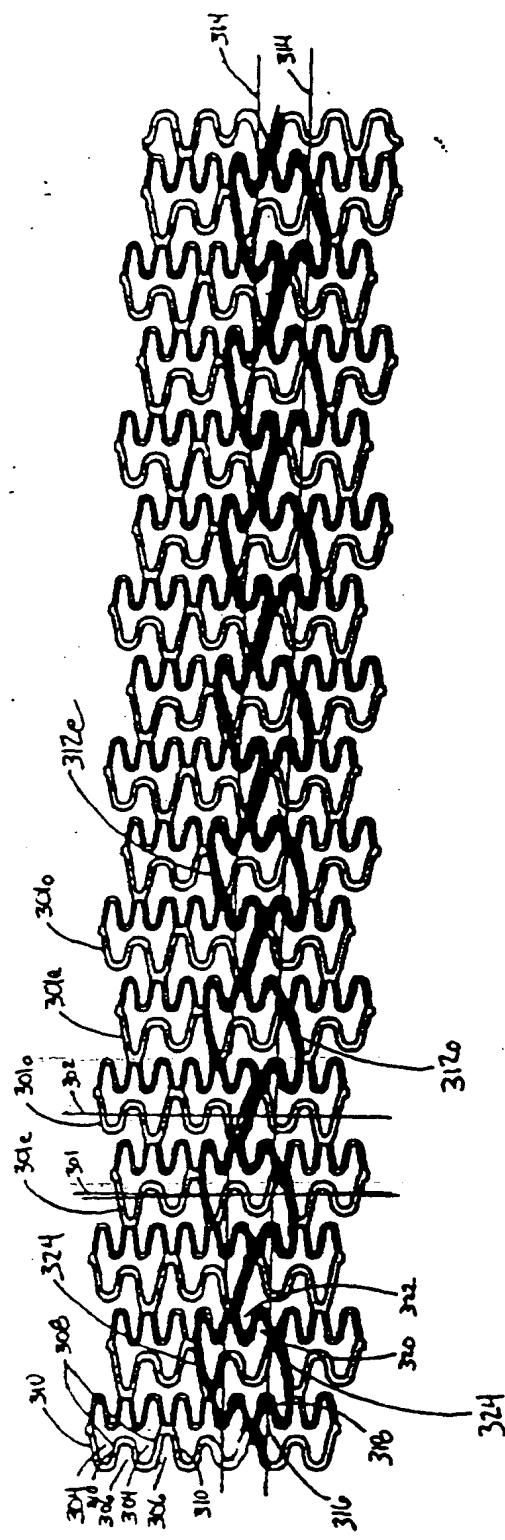


FIG. 5

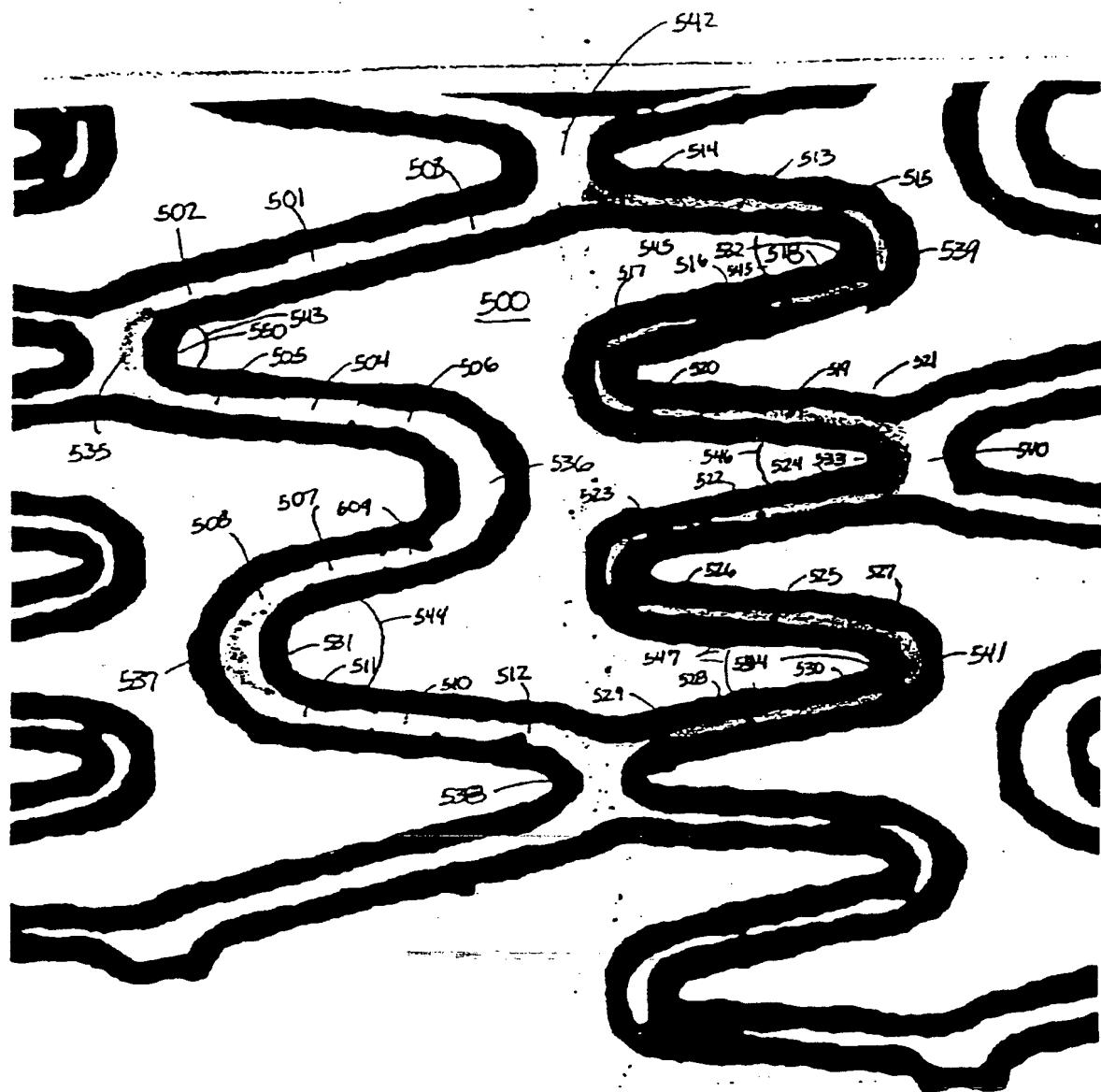


FIG. 6

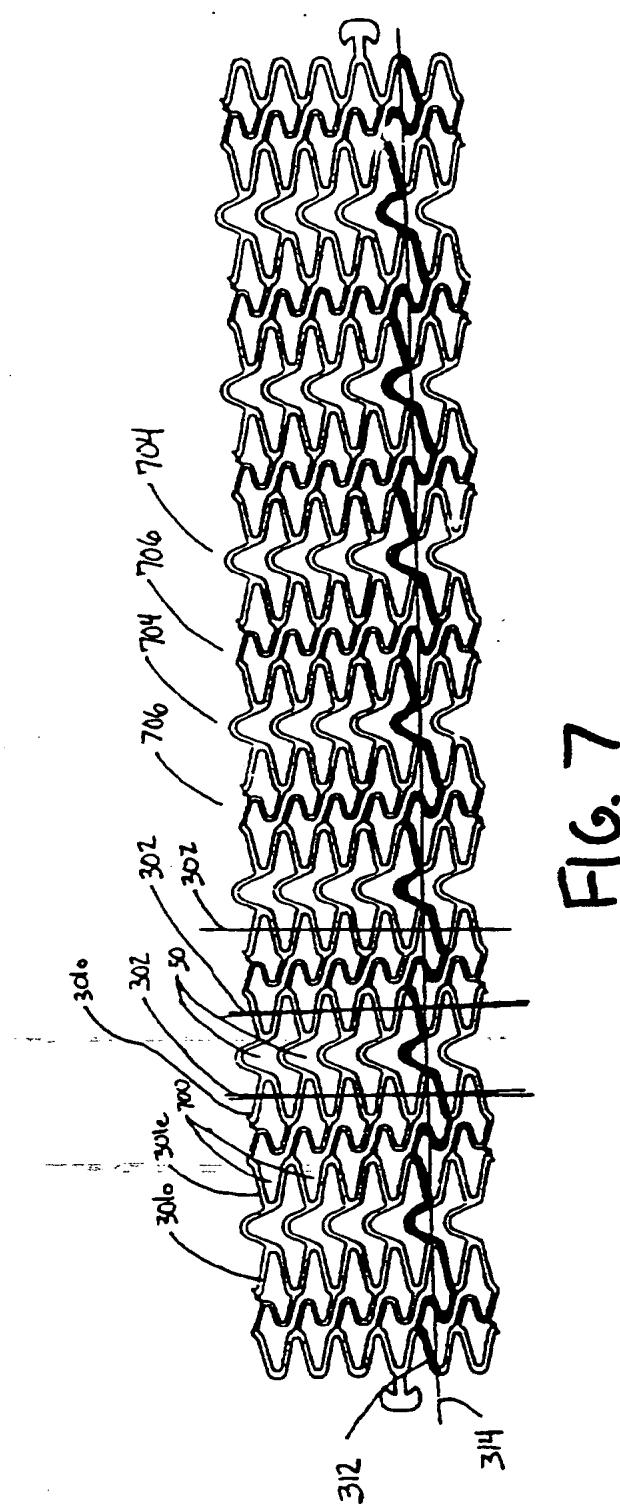


FIG. 7

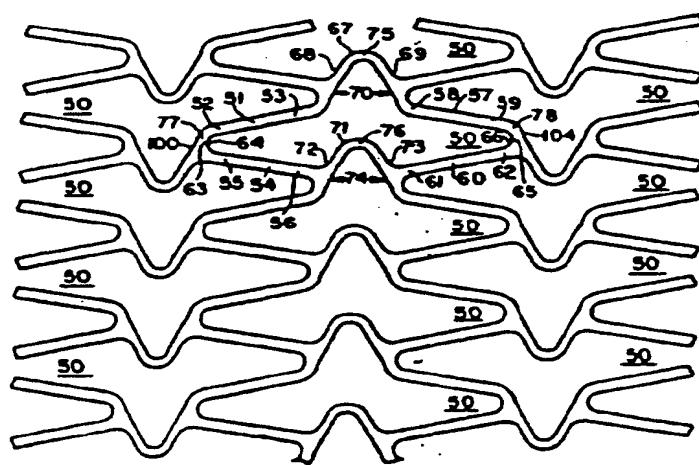
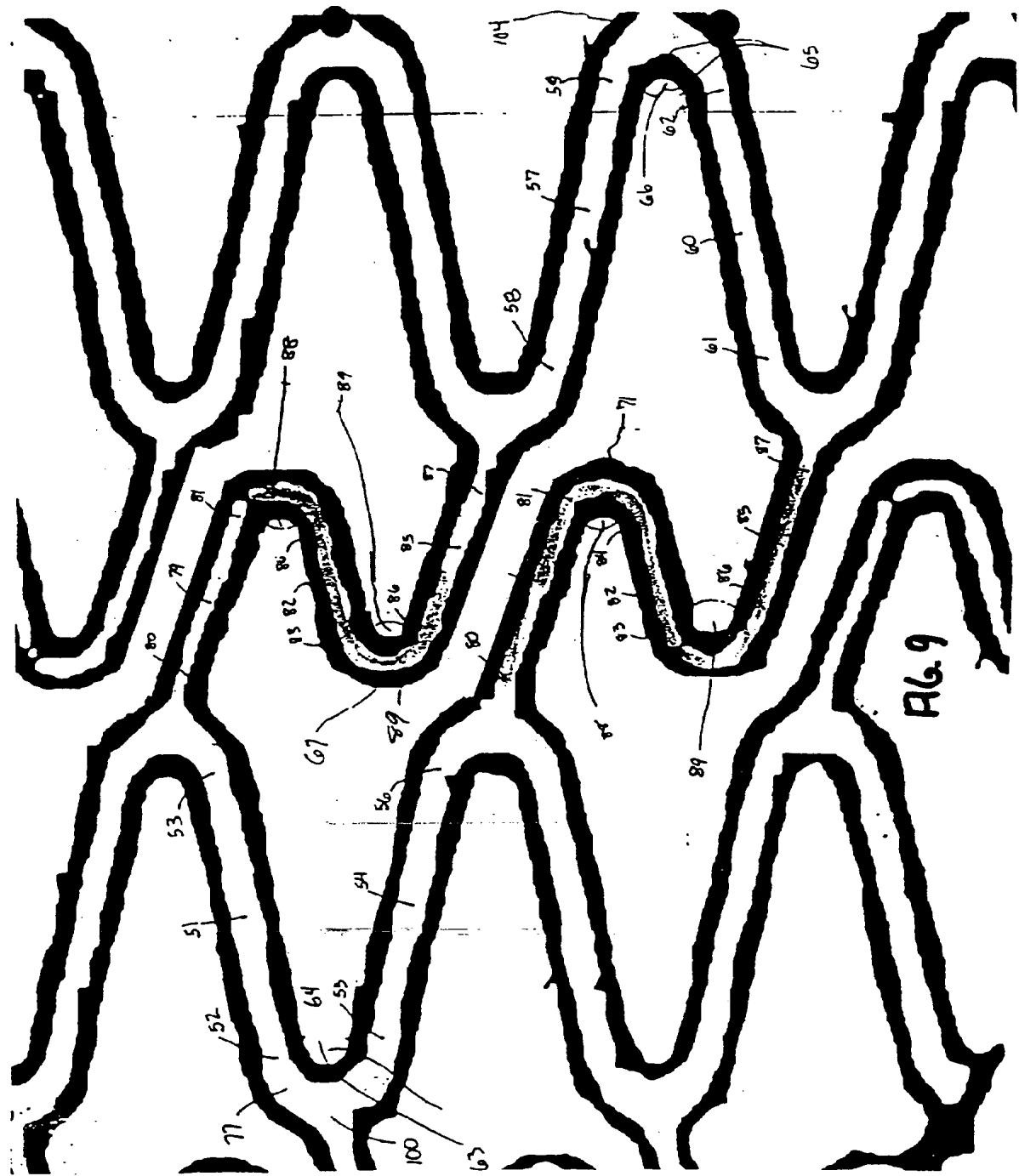


FIG. 8.



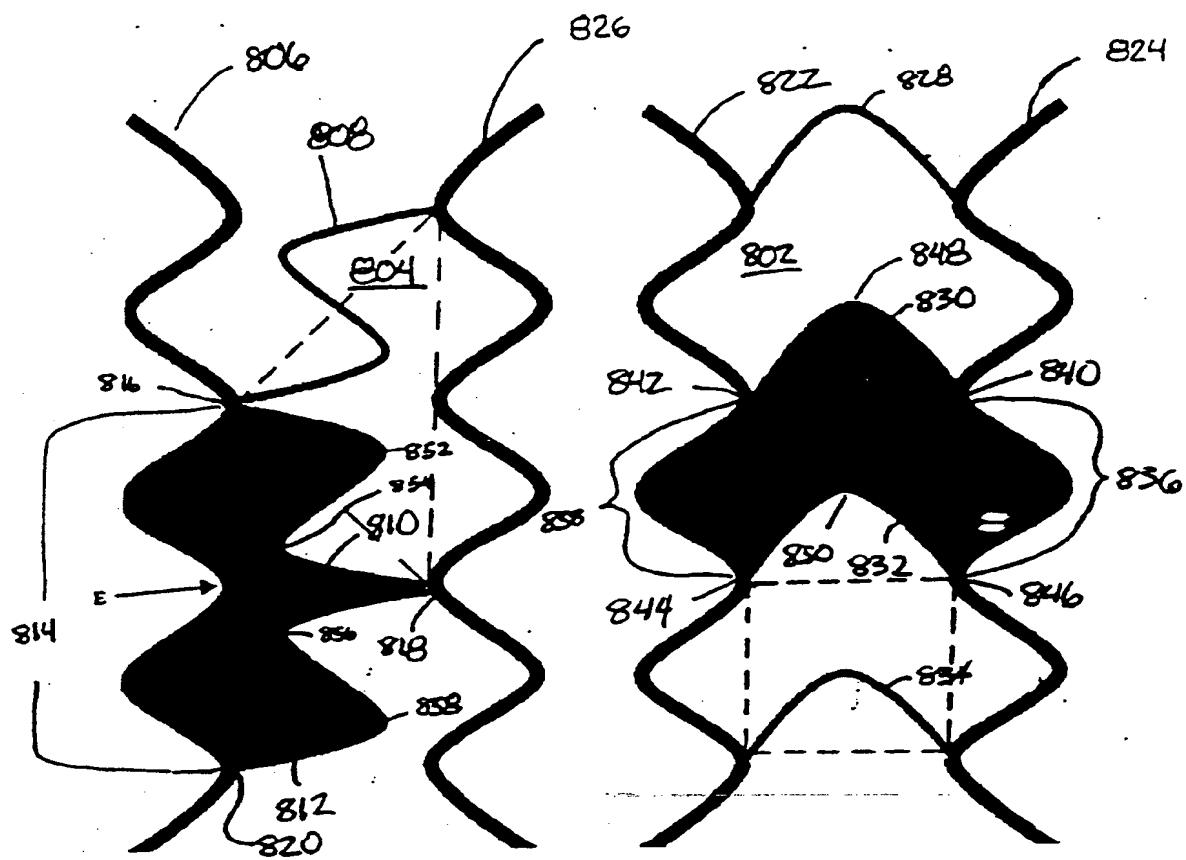


FIG. 10

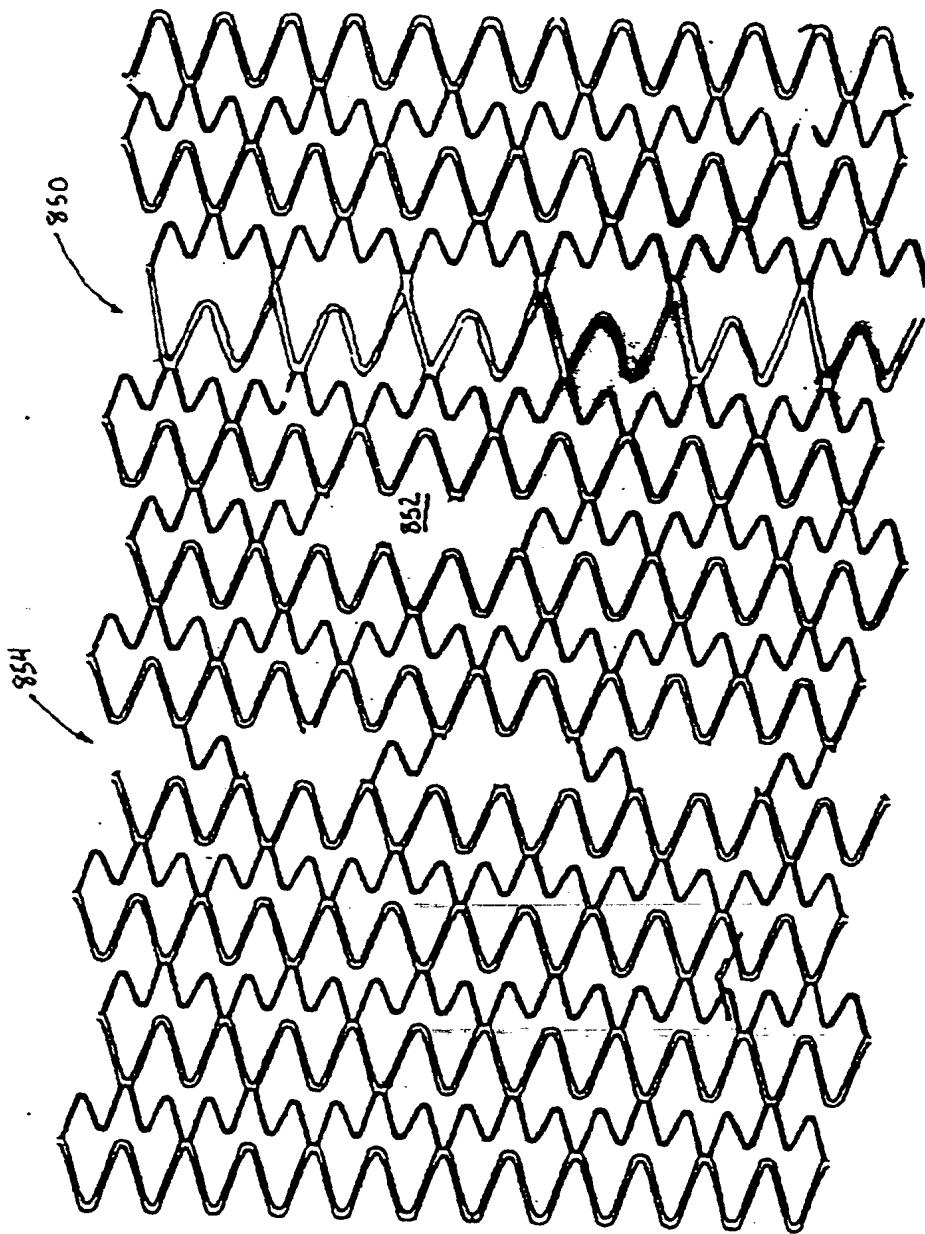
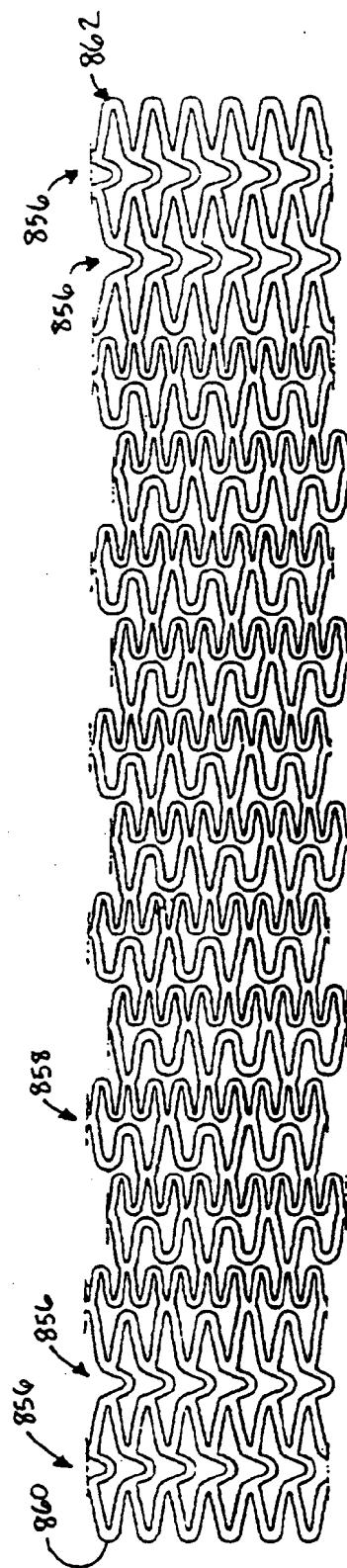
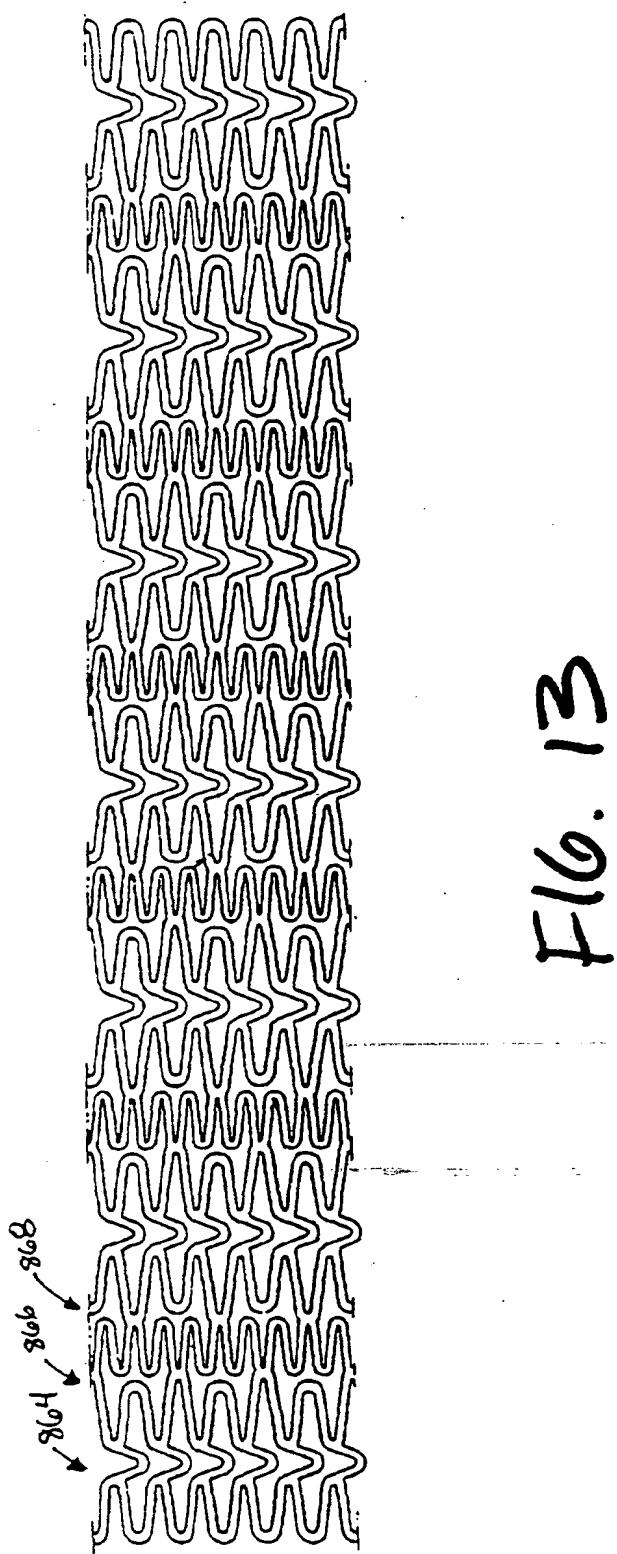


FIG. II



F16. 12



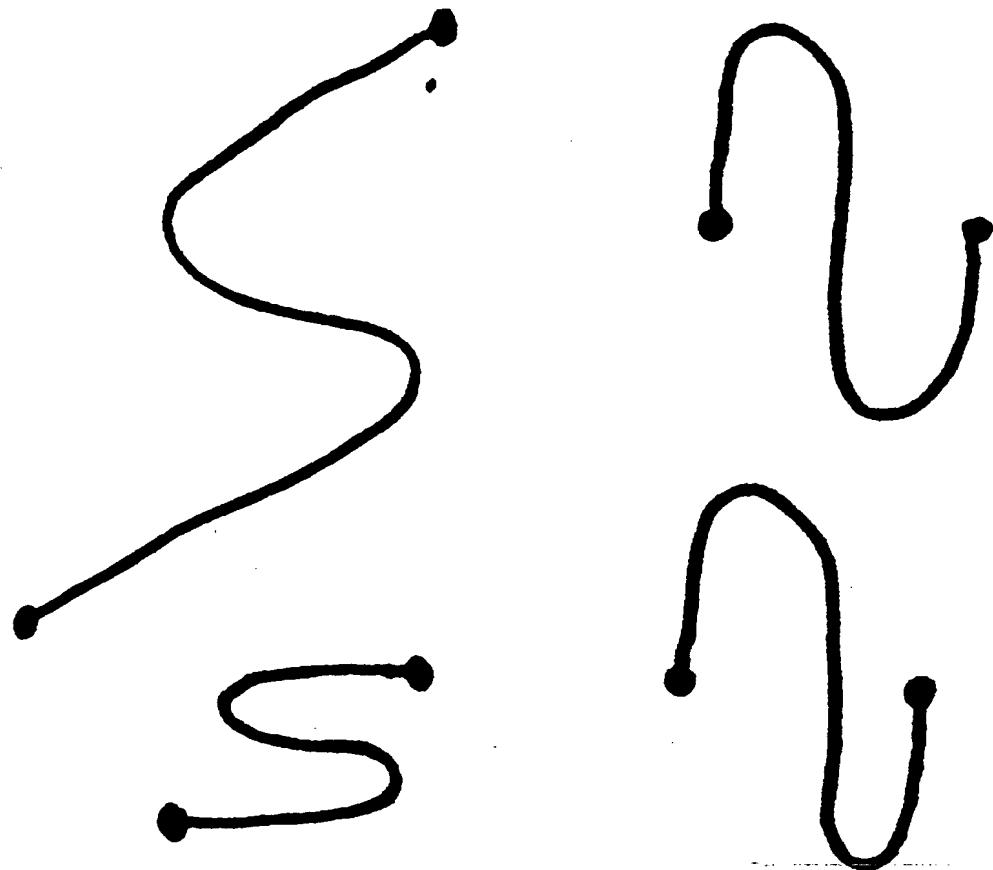


FIG. 14

(19)-



Europäisches Patentamt

European Patent Office

Office européen des brevets



(11)

EP 1 129 673 A3

(12)

EUROPEAN PATENT APPLICATION

(88) Date of publication A3:
12.12.2001 Bulletin 2001/50

(51) Int Cl.⁷: A61F 2/06

(43) Date of publication A2:
05.09.2001 Bulletin 2001/36

(21) Application number: 01104468.2

(22) Date of filing: 28.02.2001

(84) Designated Contracting States:
**AT BE CH CY DE DK ES FI FR GB GR IE IT LI LU
MC NL PT SE TR**
Designated Extension States:
AL LT LV MK RO SI

(30) Priority: 01.03.2000 US 516753
08.05.2000 US 202723 P

(71) Applicant: **Medinol Ltd.**
Tel Aviv 61581 (IL)

(72) Inventors:
• **Pinchasik, Gregory**
Herzeliya 46424 (IL)
• **Richter, Jacob**
Ramat Hasharon 47226 (IL)

(74) Representative: **Altenburg, Udo, Dipl.-Phys. et al**
Patent- und Rechtsanwälte
Bardehle - Pagenberg - Dost - Altenburg -
Geissler - Isenbruck,
Galileiplatz 1
81679 München (DE)

(54) Longitudinally flexible stent

(57) An intravascular stent especially suited for implanting in curved arterial portions. The stent retains longitudinal flexibility after expansion. The stent is formed of intertwined meander patterns forming triangular cells. The triangular cells are adapted to provide radial sup-

port, and also to provide longitudinal flexibility after expansion. The triangular cells provide increased coverage of a vessel wall. The stent can have different portions adapted to optimize radial support or to optimize longitudinal flexibility. The stent can be adapted to prevent flaring of portions of the stent during insertion.

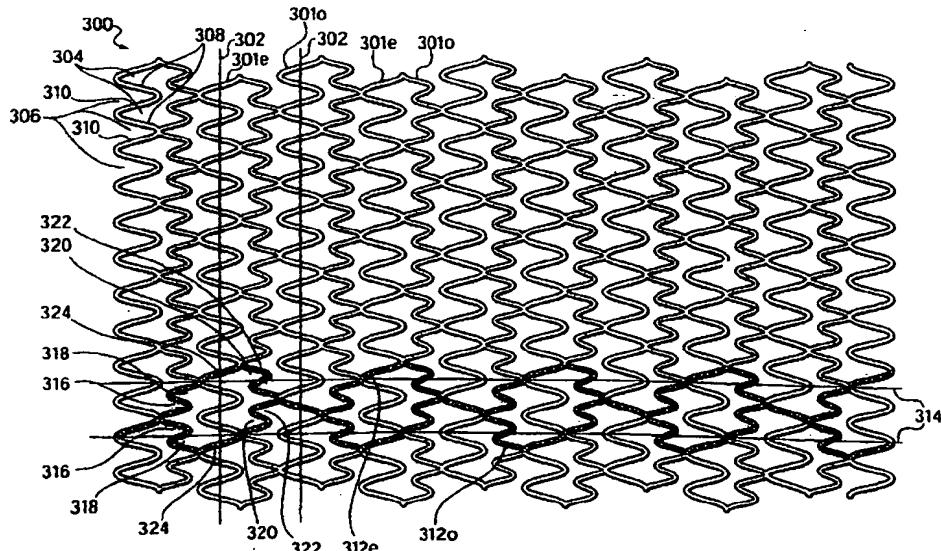


FIG. 3



European Patent
Office

EUROPEAN SEARCH REPORT

Application Number
EP 01 10 4468

DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT			
Category	Citation of document with indication, where appropriate, of relevant passages	Relevant to claim	CLASSIFICATION OF THE APPLICATION (Int.Cl.)
A	DE 195 12 066 A (VARIOMED AG) 28 November 1996 (1996-11-28) * abstract; figures * ----	1,22,39	A61F2/06
A	WO 98 35634 A (JOMED IMPLANTATE GMBH) 20 August 1998 (1998-08-20) * page 10, paragraph 2 – page 13, paragraph 2; figures 8-10 *	54,62,70	
D,A	EP 0 830 853 A (MEDINOL LTD.) 25 March 1998 (1998-03-25) * abstract; figures *	54,62,70	
TECHNICAL FIELDS SEARCHED (Int.Cl.)			
A61F			
The present search report has been drawn up for all claims			
Place of search	Date of completion of the search	Examiner	
THE HAGUE	24 October 2001	Smith, C	
CATEGORY OF CITED DOCUMENTS			
X : particularly relevant if taken alone Y : particularly relevant if combined with another document of the same category A : technological background O : non-written disclosure P : intermediate document		T : theory or principle underlying the invention E : earlier patent document, but published on, or after the filing date D : document cited in the application L : document cited for other reasons & : member of the same patent family, corresponding document	

**ANNEX TO THE EUROPEAN SEARCH REPORT
ON EUROPEAN PATENT APPLICATION NO.**

EP 01 10 4468

This annex lists the patent family members relating to the patent documents cited in the above-mentioned European search report. The members are as contained in the European Patent Office EDP file on The European Patent Office is in no way liable for these particulars which are merely given for the purpose of information.

24-10-2001

Patent document cited in search report		Publication date		Patent family member(s)	Publication date
DE 19512066	A	28-11-1996	DE AT DE DE DK EP ES JP JP US	19512066 A1 169484 T 19516191 A1 59600411 D1 734698 T3 0734698 A2 2119527 T3 3168531 B2 9010318 A 5876449 A	28-11-1996 15-08-1998 06-02-1997 17-09-1998 23-06-1999 02-10-1996 01-10-1998 21-05-2001 14-01-1997 02-03-1999
WO 9835634	A	20-08-1998	DE WO EP US	29702671 U1 9835634 A1 0900063 A1 6193747 B1	10-04-1997 20-08-1998 10-03-1999 27-02-2001
EP 830853	A	25-03-1998	US AU BR CA CZ DE EP JP NO PL SK	5807404 A 2873397 A 9704254 A 2211097 A1 9702939 A3 19740506 A1 0830853 A1 10151207 A 973878 A 321724 A1 126197 A3	15-09-1998 26-03-1998 29-12-1998 19-03-1998 13-05-1998 26-03-1998 25-03-1998 09-06-1998 20-03-1998 30-03-1998 07-10-1998

EPO FORM P0459

For more details about this annex : see Official Journal of the European Patent Office, No. 12/82

THIS PAGE BLANK (USPTO)

**This Page is Inserted by IFW Indexing and Scanning
Operations and is not part of the Official Record**

BEST AVAILABLE IMAGES

Defective images within this document are accurate representations of the original documents submitted by the applicant.

Defects in the images include but are not limited to the items checked:

- BLACK BORDERS**
- IMAGE CUT OFF AT TOP, BOTTOM OR SIDES**
- FADED TEXT OR DRAWING**
- BLURRED OR ILLEGIBLE TEXT OR DRAWING**
- SKEWED/SLANTED IMAGES**
- COLOR OR BLACK AND WHITE PHOTOGRAPHS**
- GRAY SCALE DOCUMENTS**
- LINES OR MARKS ON ORIGINAL DOCUMENT**
- REFERENCE(S) OR EXHIBIT(S) SUBMITTED ARE POOR QUALITY**
- OTHER:** _____

IMAGES ARE BEST AVAILABLE COPY.

As rescanning these documents will not correct the image problems checked, please do not report these problems to the IFW Image Problem Mailbox.

THIS PAGE LEFT BLANK